**Spiral of Silence Article Summary**

*Considering and Communicating More World Views:*

*New Directions for the Spiral of Silence*

This study serves as defense against the growing criticisms over the creation of the Spiral of Silence theory. Critics are arguing for alternative explanations for the Spiral of Silence and are questioning every aspect of the theory. This paper aimed to dismiss these critiques by providing a clear review of the Spiral of Silence, discussing general observations from the literature on this theory, as well as provide suggestions for future studies.

The author expresses that the Spiral of Silence theory can be expressed in the following sentence: “Individuals will not express their opinions if they feel their opinions are in the minority.” She elaborates upon the notion that the reason why individuals’ lack opinion expression is due in part because of a fear of isolation. “To combat these fears, we face pressure to conform in order to obtain a sense of belonging” (Noelle-Neumann, 1984). The author acknowledges that Neumann has responded to criticisms in her more recent works, addressing numerous perceived issues with her theory. With regards to these responses, here a few of her rebuttals:

* Argued that critics misunderstand the theory
* Critics tend to overlook some of the theory’s specifications
  + Spiral of Silence must begin with a controversial issue
* Believes the moral component of the theory often gets ignored
  + Spiral of Silence only takes place with morally and emotionally charged issues

Even after attempting to answer to all of her critics, the theory still tends to come

under immense criticism. The author concludes through her research that there are three discrepancies in the Spiral of Silence theory’s testing and development. These three limitations are as follows:

1. Overlooked areas of study
2. Definitions and methodological concerns
3. Author paradigms

The overlooked areas of study includes the following three as potential influences

that may lead to suppression of beliefs: the influence of others, personal traits, and culture. In regards to the influence of others, Moy and colleagues (2001) “identified that an individual’s “micro-climates” can directly influence whether or not an opinion is expressed. These micro-climates provide individuals’ with an increased willingness to speak out if they believe their friends and family share the same opinions. “Our fear of isolation increases when we think about expressing our opinions to a more general, unknown public” (Priest, 2006). Personal traits such as personal strength, conviction, self-confidence, and level of communication apprehension have also been proven to have an effect on individuals, and shows that some people may be silent because they fear communication and not just the idea of isolation. Lastly, one’s culture has a noticeable impact on one’s willingness to speak out. “Members of U.S. culture value the individual more than the group and thus may feel more comfortable articulating their thoughts.” Specific demographics, as well as gender, have also been linked as predecessors to the Spiral of Silence theory.

Next, the author tackles critic’s attacks on Neumann’s definitions and methodological concerns. One such definition that has drawn a significant amount of criticism was Neumann’s view on public opinion. The author clarifies Neumann’s definition of public opinion by stating, “public opinion must be, then, controversial and shared by multiple individuals.” Another term that critics want refined is “fear of isolation.” In Neumann’s original study, she based her conclusions off of two experiments, the Asch line experiment and Milgram’s authority obedience research. Unfortunately, these two experiments favor results from interpersonal and not mass communication, an obvious flaw to the theory’s critics.

Although there have been numerous critics of the Spiral of Silence theory, it still stands strong and extremely relevant to this day. The author proposes at the end of this article that theorists should take a new perspective and examine the theory as a means to gain new insight. She believes this paper allows for these new perspectives to be formulated, alternative explanations to be constructed, and more critical studies can be performed. This theory plays a huge role in our society today, and much more research should and can be done to further this theory’s foundation.